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ABSTRACT

A study of fall 1984 College-Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) examinees was undertaken at Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) to examine the interrelationships among CLAST scores, the number of English courses taken, grades received, and basic skills in reading and writing prior to completion of the required English sequence. The study revealed that: (1) grades in the English sequence were related to CLAST performance, with higher grades being associated with higher passing rates; (2) students with the same grade in the same course had different passing rates depending on the campus location of the course; (3) generally only students with grades of "A" or "B" in English courses had higher passing rates than students who had not taken the course; and (4) increasing the number of English courses required of students was associated with higher passing rates only for those students who entered MDCC with basic skills that fell below the cut in both reading and writing. Based on study findings, it was concluded that the policy of requiring an additional English course was a blessing to students who entered with weak communication skills, and a burden to those with adequate reading and writing skills. (EJV)

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Institutional Research

Miami-Dade Community College

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Do Courses In English Improve CLAST Performance?

A storehouse of information and beliefs about factors affecting student performance on the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) is beginning to develop. Among the beliefs that currently exist is one that taking more English courses will improve student writing ability on the CLAST. This belief was translated into action by a policy decision set forth in the summer of 1984. It stated that, in addition to completion of two English courses (ENC 1101 and ENC 1102), a third course (ENC 2301) which focused on writing would henceforth be required for graduation.

Some data also exist which at least partially support the belief that more English courses improve passing rates. One study by Belcher (Research Report 84-21) used a sample of students who passed all four parts of CLAST compared to a sample who failed at least two parts of the June 1984 administration. It was concluded that more students who passed had taken two English courses at Miami-Dade than those who failed, and that passers had higher average grades. It was also found that students who failed CLAST had taken more English courses than those who passed, perhaps due to the fact that repeated attempts were included in the course count. This finding was nonetheless in direct conflict with the "more is better" belief.

A second study by Belcher (Research Report 84-28) also supported the belief that taking more courses (other than developmental which was excluded from the analysis) was associated with increased passing rates. Students with higher grades and fewer courses, however, had passing rates which often greatly exceeded

the passing rates of students with "C" averages in English but with satisfactory completion of three courses. This finding indicated that perhaps more English is better, but it may be true only for a select group of students who have difficulty with their English courses. It was further concluded that grades in each of five English courses related to passing Reading, Writing, and the Essay, but a grade of "C" was not a sure indicator of ability to pass the communication portions of CLAST.

One purpose of this study was to revisit some of the previous findings using the group of Fall 1984 CLAST examinees. A second purpose was to tease apart the interrelationships of the number of English courses taken, grades received, and basic skills in reading and writing prior to completion of the required English sequence. Findings would relate to the policy of requiring all students to take the third English course as well as shed some light on the effectiveness of individual English course grades in certifying preparedness for the CLAST.

Results

Grades in ENC 1101, 1102, 2301 and CLAST Performance

ENC 1101 is the first course students encounter in completing the English portion of their general education requirements. Table 1 shows the results for students who received grades in this course when it was taken on either the North, South, or Wolfson Campuses. Medical Center Campus was excluded because so few CLAST examinees came from that campus. The passing rate for those who did not take ENC 1101, at least at Miami-Dade, is shown at the far right end of the table. Of all students who took the

Table 1

Percent Passing the Communication Sections
of CLAST Based on Grades in ENC 1101
And Location of Course
Fall 1984 Test Takers

	Grades											
	A		B		C		D		I,W,F		No Grade	
Campus	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Reading												
North	53	87	100	89	80	75	9	64	2	100		
South	85	98	128	96	143	88	9	69	1	33		
Wolfson	16	100	43	90	33	83	-	-	1	50		
Total	157	94	292	92	256	83	18	67	4	58	346	87
Writing												
North	53	87	94	84	69	64	8	57	2	100		
South	85	98	125	93	143	88	11	85	2	66		
Wolfson	16	100	41	85	31	78	-	-	2	100		
Total	157	94	260	88	243	79	19	70	6	86	330	83
Essay												
North	52	85	80	71	54	50	6	43	1	50		
South	80	92	113	84	110	68	6	46	1	33		
Wolfson	14	88	31	65	23	58	-	-	1	50		
Total	149	89	224	76	187	61	12	44	3	43	291	73
Number Receiving Grade												
North	61	21	112	38	107	36	14	5	2	1		
South	87	22	134	34	162	41	13	3	3	1		
Wolfson	16	15	48	45	40	38	-	-	2	2		
Total	167	21	295	37	309	38	27	3	7	1	401	--

Fall 1984 administration, 66% of them had enrolled in ENC 1101 at Miami-Dade. The most frequent grade received was a "B" on North and Wolfson Campuses and a "C" on South. As can be seen by studying the table, receiving high grades in this course was a good indicator of passing the Reading, Writing, and Essay portions of CLAST. For the total group, students who had an "A" or "B" had a higher passing rate than students who had not taken ENC 1101. Conversely, students with no grade performed better than students who had a "C" or less in ENC 1101 at Miami-Dade.

The campus where students took ENC 1101 was related to the passing rate. Students who received the same grade had different passing rates depending on where they took the course. Those who took the course and received an "A" on either the South or the Wolfson Campuses, for example, had higher passing rates in Reading and Writing than did students on North Campus. Students with a "C" on North Campus had lower passing rates in all three areas than did students from South or Wolfson.

More students enrolled in ENC 1102 than in ENC 1101. In fact, 75% of the Fall examinees received some kind of grade in ENC 1102. In this course, the modal grade was a "C" on all campuses (See Table 2). Again, obtaining higher grades in ENC 1102 was related to higher passing rates on each subtest. Students with "A's" and "B's" performed better than students without the course, but those with "C's" performed less effectively than either of these groups. Passing rates varied very little from those found for each grade in ENC 1101, despite the fact that ENC 1102 was a course which had 1101 as a prerequisite. Again, despite the same grade, students on South and Wolfson had higher passing rates than those on North.

Table 2

Percent Passing the Communication Sections
of CLAST Based on Grades in ENC 1102
And Location of Course
Fall 1984 Test Takers

	Grades											
	A		B		C		D		I,W,F		No Grade	
Campus	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Reading												
North	69	93	92	84	91	74	4	80	12	67		
South	70	99	152	97	180	87	4	50	11	100		
Wolfson	17	100	42	88	48	80	1	100	2	100		
Total	157	96	287	91	319	82	9	64	26	84	256	87
Writing												
North	64	86	87	80	82	67	4	80	14	78		
South	71	100	148	95	182	88	6	75	11	100		
Wolfson	17	100	44	92	48	80	1	100	1	50		
Total	153	94	279	89	312	80	11	79	26	84	234	80
Essay												
North	62	84	64	59	67	54	1	20	11	62		
South	69	97	130	83	149	72	2	25	8	73		
Wolfson	17	100	35	73	33	55	1	100	2	100		
Total	149	91	229	73	249	64	4	29	21	68	214	73
Number Receiving Grade												
North	74	22	109	33	123	37	5	2	18	6		
South	71	16	156	34	207	46	8	2	11	3		
Wolfson	17	13	48	38	60	47	1	1	2	2		
Total	163	18	314	34	390	43	14	2	31	4	294	-

Table 3

Percent Passing the Communication Sections
of CLAST Based on Grades in ENC 2301
And Location of Course
Fall 1984 Test Takers

	Grades												No Grade	
	A		B		C		D		I,W,F					
Campus	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%				
Reading														
North	11	100	25	100	13	87	1	100	2	67				
South	37	100	39	100	21	95	1	33	12	75				
Wolfson	9	75	6	86	4	100	-	-	4	100				
Total	57	95	70	99	38	93	2	50	18	79			868	87
Writing														
North	11	100	22	88	10	67	1	100	2	67				
South	36	97	38	97	20	91	3	100	12	75				
Wolfson	9	75	5	71	4	100	-	-	3	75				
Total	56	93	65	92	34	83	4	100	17	74			839	84
Essay														
North	11	100	23	92	10	67	-	-	3	100				
South	34	92	38	97	19	86	1	33	13	82				
Wolfson	10	83	5	71	3	75	-	-	3	75				
Total	55	92	66	93	32	78	1	25	19	83			693	69
Number Receiving Grade														
North	11	20	25	45	15	27	1	2	3	6				
South	37	32	39	33	22	19	3	3	16	14				
Wolfson	12	44	7	26	4	15	-	-	4	15				
Total	60	30	71	36	41	21	4	2	23	12			1007	-

The data on grades in ENC 2301 and CLAST performance are based on a much smaller number of students than either of the two previous tables. Only 16% of the Fall examinees had received a grade in this course compared to 10% of the examinees in June. The most frequent grade given for this course was an "A" on Wolfson, and a "B" on North and South (see Table 3). Students who received "C's" in ENC 2301 had higher passing rates on the CLAST than did those who received "C's" in either 1101 or 1102. In general, students who received a satisfactory grade in ENC 2301 (C or better) had higher passing rates in Reading and on the Essay than those who did not take the course. Though it is difficult to draw conclusions about campus differences since the numbers involved are small, especially for Wolfson, Table 3 does indicate that again, depending upon the campus where the student took the course, the passing rate varied. As before, lower passing rates were usually found for North.

Number Of English Courses, Grades, And Entering Basic Skills

It is a simple fact that some students enter Miami-Dade needing more remediation in basic skills than do other students. For the group of Fall 1984 CLAST examinees who had CGP basic skills scores, 58% fell above the 1981 cut scores in both areas of reading and writing. Therefore, 42% entered below the cut in one or both areas. Of the total group, 22% required remediation in both areas, while the remaining 20% needed remediation in one of the two areas. As shown at the bottom of Table 4, students who were most likely to take two English courses were those who needed remediation in one area. Those needing remediation in both areas were least likely to take all three courses in the English sequence.

Table 4

Percent Passing the Communication Sections
of CLAST Based on Number of English Courses
Taken and Communication Basic Skills Level Upon Entry

	Number of English Courses*									
	0		1		2		3		Total	
Needed Remediation In:	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Passed Reading										
Both	12	60	26	59	82	71	6	86	126	68
One	11	100	29	97	118	98	16	100	174	98
Neither	63	100	93	99	271	99	62	100	489	99
Passed Writing										
Both	14	70	37	84	96	83	7	100	154	83
One	10	91	28	93	114	94	15	94	167	94
Neither	63	100	93	99	269	99	61	98	486	99
Passed Essay										
Both	10	50	16	36	46	40	6	86	78	42
One	8	73	20	67	91	75	14	88	133	75
Neither	61	97	92	98	256	94	60	97	469	95
Total Number										
Both	20	11	44	24	115	62	7	4	186	100
One	11	6	30	17	121	68	16	9	178	100
Neither	63	13	94	19	273	55	62	13	492	100

*Includes only ENC 1101, 1102, and 2301.

Note: 1981 cutscores of more than 18 in CGP Reading and 21 in Writing were used to assign student to non-remediation.

Yet, it was the group that scored below the cut in both reading and writing which benefited most from the additional English courses (see Table 4). In fact, the number of English courses taken did not affect the passing rate in Reading or Writing on the CLAST for either of the remaining two groups. On the Essay, additional courses helped those who needed remediation in one area or more raise their passing rate.

Previous research has also shown that grades were associated with CLAST performance. Table 5 presents the results when this relationship is reassessed in light of basic skills in reading and writing. Of those Fall examinees who had enrolled in ENC 1102, 56% had scored above the cut on the CGP in both reading and writing. An additional 23% each scored below in either one of the two areas or in both areas prior to enrollment in ENC 1102. As shown by the bottom of Table 5, it is not surprising to find that a majority of "A's" were earned by students who needed no remediation, while most of the "C's" were earned by those who needed remediation in both reading and writing. In terms of the passing of the CLAST Reading and Writing tests, the grade received made little difference for those who scored above the cut in one or more areas. On the Essay, however, for those who needed remediation in either reading or writing, the receipt of an "A" in ENC 1102 indicated a much higher passing rate than did any other grade in that course. For those who had scored below the cut on both reading and writing, receipt of an "A" indicated a higher passing rate than any other grade in all three areas of the CLAST.

For those who needed remediation in both reading and writing, another question is raised with regard to which outcome

Table 5

Percent Passing the Communication Sections of CLAST Based on Grades in ENC 1102 and Reading and Writing Basic Skills Level Upon Entry

	Grades in ENC 1102									
	A		B		C		Other*		Total	
Below Cut on:	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Passed Reading										
Both	6	86	34	76	61	66	11	62	112	69
One	22	100	55	96	75	97	6	100	158	98
Neither	102	100	151	100	132	99	12	100	397	99
Passed Writing										
Both	6	86	41	91	75	81	16	89	138	85
One	22	100	55	96	69	90	6	100	152	94
Neither	102	100	149	99	130	97	12	100	393	98
Passed Essay										
Both	5	71	15	33	42	45	5	28	67	41
One	21	95	42	74	54	70	4	67	121	75
Neither	100	98	145	96	121	90	12	100	378	95
Total Number										
Both	7	4	45	28	93	57	18	11	163	100
One	22	14	57	35	77	48	6	4	162	100
Neither	102	26	151	38	134	34	12	3	399	100

*Includes grades of D, F, I, W, WD.

Note: 1981 CGP cutscores of greater than 18 in Reading and 21 in Writing, were used to assign students to non-remediation.

yielded a higher passing rate: completion of three English courses or an "A" in ENC 1102. In Reading, the passing rate was the same (86%). In Writing, completion of the third English course raised the passing rate to 100% from 86% for those who had received an "A". On the Essay, taking the third course again raised the passing rate. Recall, however, that conclusions are based on an extremely small number of students since those who required remediation in both Reading and Writing were also those that were least likely to have taken the third English course.

Discussion

Grades in the English sequence are related to CLAST performance with higher grades being associated with higher passing rates. However, students with the same grade in the same course had differing passing rates depending upon the campus location of the course. In particular, North Campus had lower passing rates associated with the same grade, yet had awarded higher grades to their student body. Generally, only students with grades of "A" or "B" had higher passing rates than students who had not completed the course. Therefore, obtaining a "C" currently does not indicate acceptable levels of competence.

Results as measured at a later date by the CLAST also indicated that increasing the number of English courses that students are required to take is associated with higher passing rates, but only for those students who entered Miami-Dade with basic skills scores which fell below the cut in both Reading and Writing. The differences in passing rates based on grades in ENC 1102 could also be attributed to this group. For those who fell

below the CGP cut in either one or none of the areas, neither grades nor number of English courses taken served to change the passing rate to any appreciable degree. For those who fell below the remedial cut in both reading and writing, taking a third course produced a higher passing rate on both the Writing test and the Essay than did receipt of an "A" in ENC 1102.

It appears, therefore, that the policy of requiring ENC 2301 has been a blessing to those students who entered with weakness in communication skills. The same policy, however, may be a burden to those students whose reading and writing skills were adequate; some of this group may have transferred rather than shoulder the burden. Meanwhile of those who remained, the group most in need of help from the third course, those who entered with low levels in both Reading and Writing basic skills, is also the group who has most successfully avoided this course. Altering college policy to force only those who need extra work in English into ENC 2301 should improve passing rates and stem the flight of the better prepared student from Miami-Dade.

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